Bedouins MJ4

162, 166, 101, 619, 643, 622, 361, 438

/For information on the settled tribes of the Aden Protectorate and the Hadhramaut in 1920, the territory occupied, the paramount rulers and tribal chiefs, brief history, their settlements, means of livelihood, etc., see 30: Great Britain, MJ1 Saudi Arabia, category 116, pp. 509-546./

113, 166 Bedouins MJ4

[For information pertaining to the organized resettlement of the Bedouins as agriculturalists in the Middle East, see Ml Middle East, 68: Neubart, entire source.]

233, 166, 492

Bedouins MJ4

[For information pertaining to the Shammar and their pastoral activities, migrations, animal transportation, and the like, see 12: Glubb, MG1 Jordon, category 116, pp. 19-22.]

The Bedouin settlement policy of the Transjordan Government

Since 1931 it has been the policy of the government to create favorable conditions for settlement, rather than to sponsor and carry out definite sedentarization projects. The governmental policy of encouragement was implemented by financial aid and technical assistance to the tribes, and by bringing education to the Bedouin areas.

After the two successive years of severe drought (1931 and 1932) the Beni Sakhr were granted in 1935 a governmental subsidy of LP 250 to encourage cultivation on tribal land.[1] In 1934 the administration gave the Howeitat LP 1 000 to start agriculture in the area between Ma'an and Shobek.[2] In 1935 they were granted another LP 900 for the same purpose.[3]

Besides the meager financial help the tribes were given technical advice and assistance. In 1934 the government planted 1 600 palm suckers in the experimental garden at Bagoora in the Jordan valley and 600 in the oasis at Azraq for the instruction of the Bedouin.[4] To encourage citriculture 4 500 citrus trees were grafted from the Bagoora station and distributed among the nomads who had evinced an interest in agriculture.[5] The Department of Agriculture guided and helped the Bedouin to plant these trees. Desert schools were started in 1935, one permanently established at al-Jaffer in the Ma'an district which is the central location

---

1. Report, 1935, p. 307
2. Report, 1934, p. 261
3. Report, 1935, p. 307
4. Report, 1934, p. 262
5. Report, 1937, p. 382

181 554 177 577 thoroughbreds. No race prizes lineage higher, yet they are the most democratic people in the world and the most individualistic. Among them there is real equality. To certain families, by virtue of their descent, they accord certain privileges, but as a courtesy, not as a right, and Badu sheikhs command respect only as long as they merit it. The traditional Arab way of life, fast vanishing to-day in contact with the West, owed much to Badu concepts, for the villagers and townsmen of Arabia, who form by far the greater part of her population, live close to the desert and were profoundly affected by it until motor-cars and aeroplanes removed for ever the need for camel journeys. Most of them are, indeed, of Badu origin, for the desert tides have always stranded the weak and broken upon the fringes of the Sown. Everywhere the Arabs have, at all times, judged honour and chivalry and hospitality by the standards of the tribesmen. Their love of liberty, their freedom from prejudice of class and caste, and their enthusiasm for poetry have come to them from the desert.

157 577 81 It is impossible to assess the character of the Badu, for among no other race have so many contradictory qualities been fused together. I myself have witnessed their courage and self-reliance, their endurance and pride of race, and I remember their patience, generosity, and unselfishness. But often I have been exasperated by their avarice and wearied by their endless [935] importunities. No Badu thinks it shame to beg, and usually he will look disparagingly at the gift which he has received and grumble, "Is this all [937] that you are going to give me?" Grasping and avaricious, they will talk unceasingly of money and argue heatedly for days about a dollar, then they will slaughter a camel worth 150 dollars to feed a stranger. Loyal to each other, they are yet without regard for human life and will knife an unarmed herdsboy with a jest. Cheerful and easily amused, they are generally good-tempered, though passionate when roused and quick to resent an injury.

166 I have often wondered as I rode across the desert what the future, and even the immediate future, holds for my companions and their kinsmen. The discovery of oil on the Persian Gulf is going to affect them profoundly and make it impossible for them to continue in their old ways, even if they would. I think myself that the oilfields will empty the desert. This movement of tribes from the Yaman and the Hadhramaut towards the north and the north-east is a movement which has been going on for thousands of years. It probably started even before the great migration of the Qahtan tribes, when, overwhelmed by calamity in their homes round Marib, some of them pushed across the deserts and occupied Oman. In recent years tribes such as the Awamir, Ruashid, and Manahil have left their homelands in the steppes to the north-east of the Hadhramaut and moved out into the sands to escape from the incursions of more powerful 166 177 tribes pressing on them from the west. Having accustomed themselves to life in the sands, they have penetrated ever further and further into the Empty Quarter. In the past twenty or thirty years as conditions have become more settled in the north, due to the extension of Ibn Saud's influence over the powerful Murra tribe, they have grazed their herds round the Liwa oasis and in the sands near the Trucial Coast. Now the money to be earned on the oilfields along the Gulf is drawing the Badu

in ever-increasing numbers from as far away as Najran and Dhaufar. 166
They go there at present with the intention of collecting enough money 177
to buy a camel or two, so that they can build up a new herd, or perhaps
marry, when they return to their homelands, but I think that every year
an increasing number will settle down more or less permanently round
the oilfields.

In the desert the Badu need very little to keep themselves alive. Their 438
herds provide them with milk, butter, and occasionally with meat, but 433
they have certain requirements which they cannot supply for themselves. 511
They need cloth and cooking pots, knives, ammunition, an occasional
load of dates or grain, and such simple luxuries as a handful of coffee or
a little tobacco. To get these things they visit the villages or towns and
sell a goat, a little butter, water skins, rugs, and ropes. Life in the desert
ceases, however, to be physically possible if the few but entirely essential
commodities that the desert Arab has hitherto been able to buy in ex-
change for the products of the desert become too expensive for him to
afford, but the rise in the standard of living along the Persian Gulf is
bound to send up the price of food and clothing, and the slightest rise is
now fatal to the desert economy. For the Badu have already lost several 489
important resources. In the past, desert transport was in their hands, but 231
now lorries have largely replaced camels. There was also a constant
demand in the towns and villages for good riding camels, which were
hired by the nomads, and sheikhs would pay big prices for the best breeds.
Now most of the villagers and townsmen drive about in cars. Two years
ago, when I and my companions rode from Sulayil to Laila along the
motor road, the villagers asked us why we did not go in cars "like the
Muslamin." A Badui often loses all or nearly all his animals from disease, 434
but where the tribes are still unadministered he can borrow a mount and 511
join a raiding party and perhaps repair his fortunes. In unadministered
areas they can also levy a certain amount of blackmail off the villagers,
and the village sheikhs are prepared to keep on good terms with the tribes
by giving them presents and much hospitality. Badu, however, meet with
little sympathy from modern and progressive Arab administrators, who
regard them as representing an outlook and way of life which they are
anxious to abolish.

The Badu love money; even to handle it seems to give them a thrill, 181
and I have often thought that when they are talking in their sleep they 577
must be counting piles of dollars. Yet I have never had a single dollar 461
stolen on my journeys, though my money has always been carried in 315
unsealed bags distributed at random among the saddle-bags of my com-
panions. The Badu are always obsessed with tales of buried treasure.
There is *dhahab* (gold) to be found here and *dhahab* to be found there,
under sand dunes, rocks, or even in the middle of quicksands. So
naturally the oilfields draw them like a magnet from all over Arabia,
and, once there, they find that they can get money for sitting in the shade
and guarding something, or for doing work which is certainly easier than
watering thirsty camels on a nearly dry well in the middle of summer.
There is plenty of good food, abundant sweet water, and long hours for 511
sleep. They have seldom had these things before, and now they are being 166

paid into the bargain. Family ties and a certain restlessness draw some of them back into the desert, but, as I have said, desert life is becoming more and more difficult and may soon become altogether impossible.

The hardy Badu tribesmen, the best stock in Arabia, may become, as a result of circumstances outside their control, a parasitic proletariat squatting in the fly-blown squalor of shanty towns on the outskirts of the oilfields in some of the most barren and inhospitable country in the world. I do not wish to suggest that the oil companies will not take adequate care of their workers and provide them with the best possible accommodation. Many of the Badu will certainly find employment with these companies; many of them have already shown considerable aptitude as drivers and mechanics, but it is uncertain whether as a race they are capable of the sustained effort required on an oilfield. At any rate, there will be great numbers who are unadaptable, inept, or physically incapable of finding work, and there will be the women and the children. Stranded in these salt-impregnated wastes, which can produce nothing but oil, and deprived of their old mobility, they may be unable to adjust themselves almost overnight to these new conditions and so become demoralized. Tribesmen who have never seen a car or an aeroplane or even a European will find themselves suddenly working with Englishmen and Americans who have met their first Arab ten days before. Lads who have never seen an unveiled woman are going to come in contact with European women, not only unveiled, but, in their eyes, undressed. At first they will think our dress indecent, many of our customs revolting, and our lack of religion appalling. The virtues of the desert nomads are, however, enforced by their circumstances, not by a natural preference for the ascetic way of life. In their own surroundings they are forced to be continent and self-restrained, but by nature they are self-indulgent and indolent. Their nomadic way of life, their tribal loyalties, their old interests, and the conventions which have governed their lives, will soon be swept away. Bored and disillusioned, they will, I fear, fall an easy prey to the vices and diseases of town life. They have always regarded themselves as the aristocracy of Arabia. They have taken a pride in surviving when others would succumb, and it is this pride in his manhood which the nomad expresses when he boasts, "I am a Badui." In the future they may easily drop to the bottom of the social scale, below those whom they know to be their inferiors in every way but that of adaptation to urban conditions.

A problem which confronts the rulers of Arabia is how to avoid pauperizing the nomads who will inevitably drift to the oilfields in ever-increasing numbers, and whose birth-rate is likely to rise considerably once they have settled there. It will indeed be tragic if they become the slum-dwellers of an industrialized Arabia. Poverty has been their constant lot, but it was a poverty shared by all. Now they will see Europeans and Arabs living in luxury in air-conditioned houses and provided with all the amenities of modern life. They will see wealth beyond their wildest dreams poured into the hands of a few; the Sheikh of Qatar, for instance, who until recently was the ruler of a few impoverished fishing villages and whose father sold headcloths in the market-place for a living, is now receiving royalties from an oilfield which may be one of the richest in the world.